A POEM

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE HOUSE OF CONVOCATION

OF

Trinity College,

BY THE REV. RALPH HOYT, A. M.

The True Life.

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DELIVERED BEFORE THE

HOUSE OF CONVOCATION

OF

TRINITY COLLEGE,

IN

CHRIST CHURCH, HARTFORD, AUGUST 1, 1849.

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BY THE

REV. RALPH HOYT, A. M.

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THE TRUE LIFE:

A MEDITATION.

I.

Serenest spirit of the hallowed lyre,
Sweet soother of all sorrow, come to me!
My laboring thought with utterance inspire;
Thou muse divine, thy heavenly minstrelsie
I would evoke from every truthful string,
And here a Lay of Life essay to sing.
For I must vigil while all nature sleeps;
Not self-devoted, but ordained to be
A poor wayfarer o'er life's rugged steeps;
Its sternest aspects fated still to see;
To taste its bitter draughts at many a brim;
And chant, withal, earth's earnest, awful Hymn!

II.

Thou that hast tuned my reed, if tuned it be ;
If this high prayer to such low dust belong ;
Ineffable Inspirer ! speak to me
That I sing not an inharmonious song.
Speak, to me trembling in thy glory's blaze,
That singing Life, I also sing thy praise.
The earth-strung harp but teaches man to weep ;
Furrows his aching brow before its time ;
O, give me now the lyre that I shall sweep
Upon the hills of yon celestial clime ;
God ! make my spirit like a surging sea,
Rolling its thundering anthems up to thee !

III.

Such scope I covet, fitly to adore ;
Such scope, the import of my theme to scan ;
Ocean of Life ! no swimmer finds a shore ;
Unfathomable mystery of man !
So vast, so various, whence, or whither, all
Shrouded in secrecy as with a pall.
Dread dissonance of earth ! each life a note
Swelling the mighty uproar tempest-high ;
Harmonious voices few, and too remote
To temper the wild clamor of the sky :
O for a plunge that ocean to explore ;
O for a wing that chaos to outsoar !

IV.

Give me to love my fellow ; and in love,
If with none other grace to chant my strain ;
Sweet key-note of soft cadences above,
Sole star of solace in life's night of pain ;
Chief gem of Eden, fractured in that Fall
That ruined two fond hearts, and tarnished all !
Redeemer ! be thy kindly spirit mine ;
That pearl of paradise to me restore ;
Pure, fervent, fearless, lasting love ; divine,
Profound as ocean, broad as sea and shore ;
While man I sing, free, subject, or supreme,
O for a soul as ample as the theme !

V.

I see the awful vision of all time ;
All life since man became a living soul ;
All change since woman taught him love ; and crime
And death's dark wave began o'er earth to roll ;
Stupendous pomp ; far-reaching to that night
Ere stars were kindled, or the sun gave light.
Swayed as eternal symphonies impel,
Chord answering chord, mysterious harps I hear,
And myriad voices still the anthem swell,
Pouring grand harmonies from sphere to sphere ;
Chanting historic the great psalm of Earth
Since chaos labored with its mighty birth.

VI.

Dread shape! in terror while constrained I gaze
The shadows of old ages roll away;
The Past is present, and the first of days
Pours brightly down its new-created ray;
Dim, mystic visions aggregate apace,
And primal earth stands out august in space!
How wonderful; Jehovah deigned to will
And this creation with obedient awe
Came booming forth the mandate to fulfil,
From darkness, glory; from disorder, law!
So pure, so beautiful, so formed for love,
It might allure the angels from above.

VII.

Man, the Epitome! still chiefly he
The mighty argument of that high song:
Of His omnipotence who bade him be,
Sublimest miracle of all the throng
That at his mandate from the nought of space
Came forth substantial majesty and grace.
Materiality, and essence, each
Its full perfection in his form to find;
The universe articulate in his speech,
All spirit-greatness imaged in his mind.
Harp on forever, all ye bards above,
Man still your theme; and man-creating Love!

VIII.

There swoops, again, in solitude sublime,
The shattered remnant of that elder world ;
Like some primeval orb unknown to time,
Through a wild waste of waters helmless hurled ;
On, on, careering o'er the vengeful wave ;
A rebel skeleton, denied a grave.
Dark, silent, desolate, an outcast globe,
Blasted beneath the sin-abhorring frown ;
Shorn of the sunbeam, and the verdant robe ;
In an unbounded Deluge thus to drown !
Imponderable Ruin ! can it be
The morning stars sang sweetly once for thee !

IX.

Ah, must you mourn, ye minstrels of the sky ;
Through all your strains still sweeps a note of wo,
As myriad hearts were breaking in one sigh ;
Now in profoundest octaves moaning low ;
Up the careering scale now frantic flies,
Shrieks its sad tale in heaven, and wailing dies.
Me now instruct ; that justly I discourse
Those joys and sorrows, your immortal themes ;
Reveal of each the annals, and the source ;
And as I listening muse along the streams,
And o'er the mountains, all my thoughts inspire,
Till your high burden thrill my lowly lyre.

X.

'Tis evening now, and all the stars again
Like pensive mourners, look lamenting down ;
A sister orb wo-smitten ! and a stain,
How deep and lasting, on its old renown.
What envious hand so impiously could dare,
To mar so mournfully, a world so fair.
Would I might speak to them ; my soul would know
From those high witnesses, so pure and true,
Whence came, and why, the desolating blow
Could leave such deserts where such edens grew ;
Could doom to perish an immortal race,
And earth itself, to fail and have no place.

XI.

O dream of Life ! yet good to ponder o'er
The strange vicissitudes of this low sphere ;
To mark how swiftly from its rock-bound shore
The voyagers set sail and disappear ;
How phantom-like the generations pass ;
Confessing, as they fly, all flesh is grass !
How humbled haughtiness ; how calmed all rage ;
In vain the lance and shield and brazen mail ;
Conquered and conquerors from age to age,
Down the same current gloomily all sail,
The same irrevocable doom to read,
With Goth, and Roman, Hebrew, Greek, and Mede.

XII.

Old Nineveh, of great Aturian Phul ;
Ecbat'na, Babylon, and Tyre remote ;
Menuf, and Meròè, that in the dull,
Far-distant verge of mythic ages float,
Still gliding down upon the fated way,
And mote by mote, still crumbling in decay.
Great shrines of Phtha ; and hundred-gated walls ;
The pillared temples where old bactrians knelt ;
The chiselled marble of imperial halls,
Where Pharoes, Ptolemies, and Cæsars dwelt ;
Strong fanes of Iuve, piled to meet the sky,
All, in the wreck of empires, long gone by.

XIII.

Speak, stars, ye nightly mourners, and no more
In mute amazement wait the coming hour
That shall earth's wasted excellence restore,
And give man back his innocence and power.
Too long your silent sorrow ; soothless grief
May quench your glory, yet bring no relief.
Known your sad secret ; mark the fearful word
Rebellion, traced on every human brow ;
And oft in scathing tempests hath been heard
The tale that moves your deep compassion now.
Yet, to our call ye weeping worlds reply ;
Man and his Home in ruin ! Tell us why !

XIV.

Great volume of the Word, behold, in thee
The dark enigma is resolved and clear ;
But lo, the eye of nature cannot see,
And ah, the ear, too heavy, cannot hear.
His paradise how long with wo o'erspread,
And the immortal dweller, outcast, dead !
Dead ; yet infatuated not to know
Essential vigor, beauty, truth, and love
Fled when he dealt the self-destroying blow,
And lost the life that cometh from above.
O Word almighty, the dread bondage break ;
Awake the sleeper ; bid the dead awake !

XV.

Companion mine, along this devious page,
Let me a tale discourse to thee awhile,
May haply much thy curious ear engage,
And this brief hour right worthily beguile ;
Yet, as the chronicle unfolds to view,
Though fancy's record, deem the burden true.
In sooth, my soul is fain to seek repose,
And would to thee its lore of years impart;
The meditative gatherings disclose
That miser memory garners in the heart ;
A tale of death, pride, passion, riches, fame;
And virtue tried in love's intensest flame.

XVI.

In a sweet vale, amid a desert waste,
  There dwelt a maiden radiant as light;
As a pure angel delicate and chaste;
  No lovelier form e'er greeted mortal sight;
Nor lived she but to bless, and wide to show
The living joys that truth and love bestow.
  At every fount of knowledge drank she deep;
Not erudition's sages so profound;
  Of things divine could scale the cloudy steep,
And all the depths of faith and reason sound.
    Yet ever meek, no one desire she knew,
    Save still to be all heavenly and true.

XVII.

Such peerless charms and all-surpassing grace
  That humble vale might not unknown retain;
A world were blest to look upon that face,
  And contemplate a heart that knew no stain.
From hill to hill wide flew the wondrous tale,
So bright a gem in such a lowly vale.
  Came one and knelt adoring at her shrine;
And sooth, a great and seemly suitor he;
  Could she his prayer and proffered hand decline?
Ah, who can know a maiden's mind, perdie!
    Not all unmoved his suppliance she heard,
    Yet gave no hope, save only hope deferred.

XVIII.

Ah, gentle fair, why thus my suit disdain,
  Cried he reproachful, with offended pride ;
A nobler name in story must I gain ;
  What task performed shall win thee for my bride ?
Though years attest my studious toil for thee,
Yet say what more to do ; what more to be.
  Then she, all-pitying, raised a tearful eye,
And owned the fond emotion of her breast ;
  But, thoughtful, drew a deep, deploring sigh,
And a strange, startling answer thus expressed ;
    O noble youth, though earth's best gifts are shed
    Around and on thee, thou, alas, art dead !

XIX.

Life's germ from heaven, though on earth the bloom ;
  And seems the flower with full perfection blest ;
But ah, there's poison in its sweet perfume,
  And spots appear within its snowy breast.
How could I weep in soothless, ceaseless grief,
That life so soon is sere and yellow-leaf.
  Perfidious heart; so subtle, so debased,
But for the bitterness in it that springs,
  The tearful history were soon erased,
And earth-born man would soar on seraph wings.
    Thy nature needs the re-creating sway,
    Of Him who is the Life, the Truth, the Way.

XX.

As starts a dreamer when some hideous shape
The slumbering sense with sudden terror thrills ;
So he, with shuddering soul, would fain escape
Back to the refuge of his native hills.
But still transfixed he stood in mute dismay,
Till all like some dread vision passed away.
Again ere long to conscious thought returned,
He sighed the import of her words to know ;
Dead ? while his bosom with such ardor burned ;
Love, reason, and ambition all a-glow ;
Yet oh, that word, with such dread meaning fraught,
And that sweet spirit ; could they be for nought ?

XXI.

Stern lesson ; yet much profit to the soul;
Good to be taught the worthlessness of pride ,
To free the spirit from earth's strong control ;
And on the sea of sorrow heavenward glide.
Humility ; the burthened heart's release ;
Who enters that low portal findeth peace.
Not fair Avoca's deep sequestered dell,
Such sweet serenity and rest bestows ;
Nor winding Arno's bowery banks can tell
The weary traveller of such repose
As soothes the soul when humbly it adores ;
And from above the promised blessing pours.

XXII.

The maiden's bower again he trembling sought,
And prayed a lover's pure, impassioned prayer ;
O might he at her feet the truth be taught ;
Or would she but vouchsafe to tell him where,
Where might he terminate the doubtful strife,
And find, if he were dead, the soul's True Life.
O sweet to see how she inclined her ear ;
How soon disclosed the true and living way ;
And ah, how brake his heart the brimming tear,
That bade him never from her love to stray,
As forth, elate, with hastening step she trode,
And showed a temple,—Truth's august abode.

XXIII.

Now onward thou, she cried ; the mountain climb,
And press for yonder porch with stedfast heart ;
There enter, and the wisdom of old-time
Its prophet-voices shall to thee impart ;
Obey, and lo, thou shalt to life arise,
And this, my long-sought hand, shall be thy prize.
Then thitherward a hopeful look he cast,
Bending his step within a narrow way ;
And on his joyous pilgrimage he passed,
Still wending onward all the weary day,
Till at the portal pausing, lowly there
He knelt and breathed a penitential prayer.

XXIV.

Deluding world ! yet how the moments roll,
That still unfold its fanciful disguise,
And show the sterile winter of the soul ;
Blight on its blossoms, gloom upon its skies ;
Its buds of innocence unblown depart,
Strewing their leaves all withered on the heart.
Nor Flora's beauty, nor her sweet perfume
O'er hills, and vales, and woodlands, can restore
The fallen tree of life its eden bloom ;
It cannot see the sun it saw before ;
It cannot its decaying stem renew ;
Dead; in the wintry garden where it grew.

XXV.

O Fount of Life ! in thy blest courts how free
The sacramental stream all-cleansing flows,
When the benighted wanderer bends the knee,
And o'er his head the mystic waters close :
Baptismal Jordan ! and the Spirit-Dove !
Life, reconciliation, peace and love !
So knew the pilgrim as the Ghostly shower
From holy hands descended on his head ;
Regenerated ! By redeeming power
Awaked from sleep ; arisen from the dead !
How flashed the light ! what rapture filled the youth;
There, and forever his, were Life and Truth !

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